

# About Advocacy

*The Scottish Independent Advocacy Alliance Magazine*

*Summer 2010*



**The Scottish Public Services Ombudsman:**  
Complaining made easy  
Page 4

**How to complain about the police:** The Police Complaints Commissioner for Scotland  
Page 6

**New initiatives** from the Mental Health Tribunal for Scotland  
Page 10

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## Contents

- 3 Citizen Leadership
- 4 The Scottish Public Services Ombudsman
- 6 Police Complaints Commissioner for Scotland
- 8 Scottish Government's Dementia Strategy
- 10 Mental Health Tribunal for Scotland: Recent Developments
- 12 Older Families Charter for Change
- 14 for Scotland's Disabled Children
- 16 Parents' Advocacy worker

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## Editorial

Welcome to the summer edition of *About Advocacy* which is the journalistic equivalent of Woolworth's 'pic 'n' mix'! That is, it's not a themed edition like the past few, but more of a mixed bag, with articles covering all age groups and several client groups.

I'm pleased that both the Scottish Public Service's Ombudsman and the Police Complaints Commissioner for Scotland have contributed articles on their service and your right to complain. Also we have an update on the work of the Mental Health Tribunal Scotland as well as Scotland's new dementia strategy.

As we all know, there is much innovation in the voluntary sector in Scotland — something that people don't always appreciate — and this edition features examples of yet more inspiring projects. If one of the projects inspires you, make contact and get involved!

*Vincent Finney*  
Editor

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### Thank you:

The SIAA would like to thank all the individuals who have contributed to this newsletter.

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### Disclaimer:

The views expressed in this newsletter are those of the individual authors and should not be taken to represent those of the Scottish Independent Advocacy Alliance.

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An electronic copy of this magazine can be downloaded from our website: [www.siaa.org.uk](http://www.siaa.org.uk).



# Citizen Leadership

By Chloe Trew, Scottish Consortium for Learning Disability

*The Scottish Consortium for Learning Disability (SCLD) has been supporting a group of people who use services and carers called the User and Carer Forum for some years now. Originally constituted to support the Scottish Government's 21<sup>st</sup> Century Social Work Review, Changing Lives, the group has gone from strength to strength.*

One of its key achievements has been the development of Citizen Leadership, an approach to improving service design and delivery based on encouraging the leadership potential of people who use services and carers.

Citizen Leadership represents the idea that everyone has the potential to be a leader, no matter what their background. It also asserts the responsibility which people who use services have to work for positive change, through personal development, partnership, awareness raising and combating inequality and discrimination. In short, Citizen Leadership is about people taking the lead to make things better.

A Citizen Leadership approach is underpinned by 8 key principles:

- **Potential** — Everyone should have their leadership potential recognised
- **Development** — People's leadership potential can only be fulfilled through opportunities for development
- **Early involvement** — People who use services and carers must be involved at all stages of developing and delivering services
- **Person-centred** — Everyone is an individual and should be helped to show leadership in the way that suits them best

- **Information** — People need information that is clear to them and they need it in plenty of time
- **Equality** — People use their leadership skills to challenge inequality in services and wider society
- **Control through partnership** — Citizen Leadership enables people to have more control over their own lives and services, through working in partnership with those services
- **Wider benefit** — Citizen Leadership is for the benefit of other people who use services as well as yourself

*"...everyone has the potential to be a leader"*

SCLD, along with numerous other organisations, has been working to promote awareness and understanding of Citizen Leadership. The Scottish Government has asked SCLD to produce a good practice resource around Citizen Leadership. We will be searching for excellent examples of Citizen Leadership from all community care groups across Scotland and looking to make a short film about them, which we will then post on an accessible website which will be the Citizen Leadership Gallery. We hope that this will be a tool which will inspire others to adopt the Citizen Leadership approach.

For more information or to have your work featured in this project, contact Chloe at [chloe.t@scl.co.uk](mailto:chloe.t@scl.co.uk) or phone 0141 418 5420



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## **The Scottish Public Services Ombudsman: Complaining Made Easy**

By Gráinne Byrne, Communications Officer, SPSO

**SPSO** Scottish  
Public  
Services  
Ombudsman

*"The best laid schemes o' Mice an' Men, Gang aft agley" — Rabbie Burns had a point, from time to time things go wrong — whether it's travel plans being hampered by an unexpected ash cloud or a downpour just as laundry has been hung out to dry. While we don't have the power to control the weather, there are places to turn to when we need to try to sort out other kinds of problems.*

Many of us rely on public services from the council, housing associations, the NHS and other

organisations. When things go wrong with these necessary services, we do get a chance to sort things out, by doing something that not everyone enjoys doing — complaining. If an organisation fails to provide a service or delivers a service badly, you have the right to complain and let them know that you are unhappy. This is fine in principle, but complaining is not easy for everyone.

There are lots of reasons people don't like to complain — some people are wary of 'upsetting

the applearcarts' especially when they rely very heavily on public services and worry that complaining could have a negative impact on the service that they receive. Others don't like complaining as they worry about being burdensome or fear that it won't make any difference.

Independent advocacy organisations are a great source of assistance and support for people who find it difficult to make a complaint or raise an issue with a public service provider. For many people having an independent person to support them to write letters and make phone calls, can relieve a lot of the fear and pressure that can be experienced when complaining — they provide an invaluable service for people who for whatever reason cannot complain themselves.

Most public service providers have complaints procedures which can help people direct their complaint so that the issues raised can be looked into and a solution sought. When a complaint is made, the organisation will investigate it and try to find a suitable remedy to fix things and stop the problem from happening again. In the minority of cases, when a complaint has not been resolved by the public service provider, the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO) can normally look into it to find out what went wrong and might make recommendations to sort things out. The SPSO can take complaints from independent advocates on behalf of their advocacy partner with their consent.

The SPSO can normally look into unresolved complaints only after the complaints procedure of the organisation has been fully used; this gives the organisation a chance to sort the problem out first. The SPSO can look into complaints about any organisation providing a public service in Scotland, including councils, hospitals, GPs and dentists, housing associations, the Scottish Government and colleges and universities. When it finds fault, the SPSO can make recommendations for improvement. These aim to put things right for the person making the complaint, as far as is possible, and to try to prevent the same thing happening again.



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Research shows that for every person who makes a complaint, there are many more people who were unhappy but did not complain. Things may not change if nobody complains, and letting organisations know what has gone wrong gives them an opportunity to try to put things right. The SPSO publishes the results of its work so that the learning gathered from complaints can be shared among organisations to improve how services are delivered in the future.

The SPSO produces a range of information, both in print and on-line, on its work and how to complain, including a letter template to help construct a 'formal' complaint letter. The SPSO website is Browseraloud compatible for web users with literacy requirements or visual impairment; and also key leaflets are available in easy read and audio versions. All material is available in other languages and formats such as Braille on request and the office is wheelchair accessible with a private area for discussing complaints. The SPSO also operates a freephone advice line and is always happy to talk to independent advocates about making a complaint.

SPSO, Freepost EH641, Edinburgh EH3 OBR

Freephone **0800 377 7330**  
Email **ask@spso.org.uk**  
Website **www.spso.org.uk**



## Police Complaints Commissioner for Scotland

By Christine McAllister, Communications Manager, Police Complaints Commissioner for Scotland

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*Making a complaint about the police is not something that anyone does lightly or without giving thought to the circumstances that led to the problem and weighing up whether on balance the police served them well or not.*

Even when you decide to make your complaint formally to them, it can still be a daunting prospect, especially as most people have little or no direct contact with the police in their everyday lives. Two new leaflets 'A guide for complaints about the police' and 'A guide for the public on the role of the Police Complaints Commissioner for Scotland' have been launched this month to take you through the steps involved in making a complaint about the police.

Complaints about the police fall essentially into two categories: criminal or non-criminal with separate bodies responsible for each.

- If you think that a member of the police has broken the law, then it's a criminal matter, which is the responsibility of the Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service. You can report it to the Chief Constable of the force and he or she will refer it to the Area Procurator Fiscal.
- If your complaint is about the behaviour of the police or civilian staff, or the quality of the service you received from them, then this is something that police would investigate in the first instance. If, after their investigation, you remain unhappy you can ask the Police Complaints Commissioner for Scotland, to review the way the police handled your complaint.

It is important to note that when someone makes a non-criminal complaint about the police, there are opportunities for it to be resolved at an early

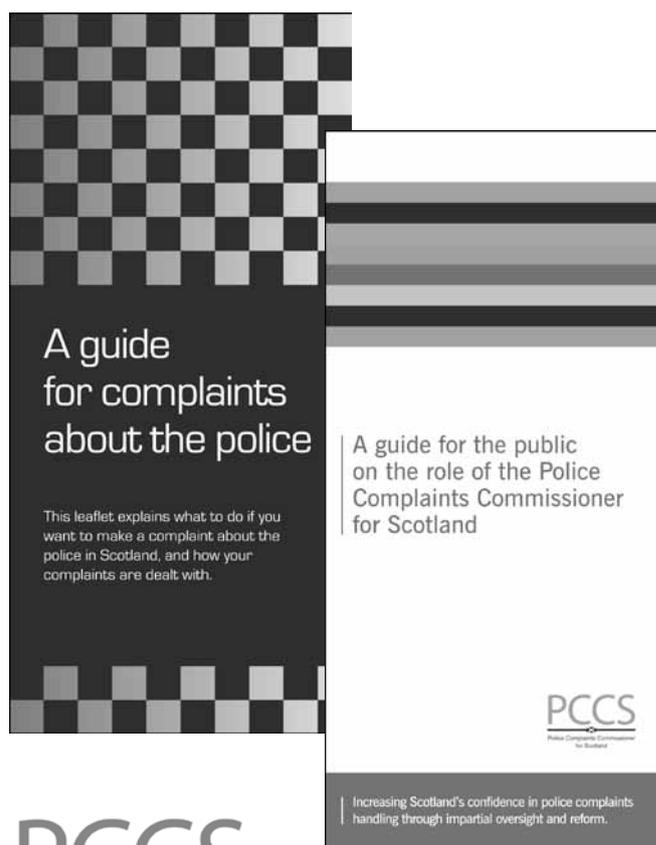
stage, without the need for a full investigation by the police or for a referral to the Police Complaints Commissioner. Furthermore, the Commissioner will only review how a complaint was handled, when the police have concluded their own investigation. Sometimes a conversation can clear up a misunderstanding or a letter can explain why the officers did what they did. In many cases, that's exactly what happens. But, in some cases—almost 400 last year—the person with the complaint contacts the Police Complaints Commissioner for Scotland to see if he can help.

Make sure you include the circumstances that led to your complaint and make it clear what your complaint about the police is as this information will help the PCCS deal with your application. By signing the form, you are agreeing to PCCS asking the police organisation you are complaining about, to share any information it has about your complaint. Once the Commissioner establishes that your complaint is within his powers to review, he will ask the police organisation you are complaining about for the information it has about what has happened so far, and you will be updated on progress at least once every 28 days.

The Commissioner and his team will examine the facts of the case, looking at all the information provided by you and the police organisation. He will look at how the police organisation reached its conclusions, review the evidence on which the conclusion was based and form a view on whether the conclusions reached were reasonable. Following his review he can recommend that the police do a number of things:

- carry out further investigation and provide a further response to the person who made the original complaint
- reconsider the entire complaint, sometimes this is done under his direct supervision
- make changes to practices and procedures to prevent the same thing happening again

The Commissioner will write to you and the police organisation involved to let you know his final conclusions. This will include: your



*New leaflets from the PCCS*

complaint; the background to your complaint; what the police organisation did to deal with your complaint; the PCCS consideration of the way the police organisation handled your complaint; the PCCS conclusions and, where appropriate, any recommendations to the police organisation for action. In the spirit of openness the Commissioner's reports will be usually be published, fully anonymised, on the PCCS website.

You can:

- download an application form to request a review from [www.pcc-scotland.org](http://www.pcc-scotland.org)
- call free on 0800 178 5577
- or email [enquiries@pcc-scotland.org](mailto:enquiries@pcc-scotland.org).

# Transformational Change to Deliver World Class Dementia Care and Treatment in Scotland



By Jan Killeen, Director of Policy, Alzheimer Scotland



*The Scottish Government's Dementia Strategy was launched on 1 June 2010 and represents a major milestone in the history of dementia care in Scotland.*

Alzheimer Scotland believes it is a significant step forward in tackling many of the difficulties experienced by people with dementia and their families. The Strategy is for an initial 3 years, to be followed by a second three year stage to take into account the progress and learning from the first. It is unfortunate that it is only now, in such an uncertain economic climate, that dementia is receiving the necessary level of government priority. The Government has taken

a partnership approach to the development and implementation of the strategy, which we believe is the only way forward given the complexities of the illness.

The Executive Summary states that the Scottish Government is committed to developing and implementing standards of care for dementia; improving staff skills and knowledge in both health and social care settings; providing integrated support for local change; continuing to increase the number of people who have a diagnosis to enable them to have better access to information and support; ensuring that people

receiving care in all settings get access to treatment and support that is appropriate; continuing to support dementia research in Scotland; providing excellent support and information to people with dementia and their carers; and improving the response to dementia in general hospital settings including alternatives to admission and better planning for discharge.

The Scottish Government is giving priority to making improvements in these last two areas which are viewed as achieving immediate benefits for people as well as improving the efficiency and quality of the care system, releasing resources to improve access to care.

The Strategy aspires to transformational change to service delivery to enable the personalisation of care and focuses on how that might be managed within existing budgets. The Government intends to take forward a project focused on a particular geographical area and involving an NHS Board and a local authority to explore the impact of a whole system redesign project looking at the dementia pathway and how budgets can be used more effectively.

Training has been recognised as a significant issue and work to improve staff skills and knowledge in both health and social care settings is to be taken forward in two stages: to establish a common understanding of what the baseline knowledge and skills in respect of dementia should be for each particular role; and to develop a plan to ensure that people have the appropriate knowledge and skills—to include embedding new competencies into existing frameworks and continuous professional development structures as well as developing new training opportunities and requirements.

A key area for reform which is very close the heart of the advocacy movement is the way in which people with dementia have been treated in relation to what is commonly labelled 'challenging behaviour'. This section of the strategy includes a series of actions to ensure better outcomes for individuals. It includes support and training for staff in person-centred care; the use of

psycho-social therapies where the person has distressing symptoms of dementia; and the use of psycho-active drugs only as a last resort in relation to severe psychological symptoms. There will be work to establish a base line and set targets for a reduction in prescribing. There will also be work to improve compliance with the legal framework in Part 5 of the Adults with Incapacity Act, to ensure that where a person with dementia is given medical treatment his or her capacity to consent is properly assessed.

*“Alzheimer Scotland believes this is a significant step forward in tackling many of the difficulties experienced by people with dementia and their families.”*

Although the Strategy provides for the development of a strong improvement programme and highlights the role of community in supporting people with dementia to continue their normal lives as long as possible, it does not address the need to increase services to meet the growing demands from our aging population. This issue ought to be fully addressed within the Scottish Government's 'Reshaping Care for Older People' agenda which is currently out for consultation. This document, along with the dementia strategy and the forthcoming Carers Strategy should be considered together—advocacy groups are well placed to pull together the implications for service users and to support them to have their voices heard by local and national government.

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For the Dementia Strategy and consultation reports see:  
[www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Health/health/mental-health/servicespolicy/Strategy](http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Health/health/mental-health/servicespolicy/Strategy)

For the Charter of Rights for People with Dementia see: [www.alzscot.org](http://www.alzscot.org)

# Mental Health Tribunal for Scotland: *Recent Developments*

By Dr Joe Morrow, President, Mental Health Tribunal Scotland

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*The Mental Health Tribunal for Scotland (MHTS) is planning a number of new initiatives which will increase its efficiency and effectiveness, whilst keeping the patient at the centre of the whole process and abiding by the principles laid down in the Mental Health (Care and Treatment) (Scotland) Act 2003.*

MHTS is committed to improving its case management systems by merging them into one system and thus dealing with applications, scheduling of hearings and recording of decisions all on the one IT system. The main thrust of this initiative is that the software programs will no longer be episodic, but wholly focussed on the patient, thus providing a holistic view of the patient's care and dealings with the MHTS. Planning has begun for the development of the new software required.

The MHTS is also looking at speeding up the process of applications by creating an environment where applications can be made 'online'. Tribunal members already receive papers electronically, and our aim is to further promote online use, in particular in respect of applications from Mental Health Officers and other parties.

One of the concerns about Tribunal proceedings is the number of repeat hearings and so the target of the MHTS will be to get a case before a full tribunal only once, where appropriate. A variety of groups have been consulted with a view to making greater use of hearings under rule 58 of the Tribunal's Rules of Procedure. In essence, rule 58 states that, if everyone agrees, a case can be dealt with without the parties being present.

This does not mean that the parties do not have the chance to participate, since there is an

opportunity for submissions to be made to the Tribunal, and any rule 58 case will be heard before a full tribunal.

The Tribunal is a semi-inquisitorial body which can ask questions and seek explanations on its own initiative. Any case at which parties were not present would not be dealt with in a perfunctory manner. The tribunal panel will deal with the application in the usual way considering the evidence and applying the relevant legal tests.

*“One of the concerns about Tribunal proceedings is the number of repeat hearings and so the target of the MHTS will be to get a case before a full tribunal only once, where appropriate.”*

The reason to explore and use rule 58 more fully is that people often ask at a hearing where an adjournment takes place why the Tribunal is putting the patient or the carers through the process when there is no final outcome on that day. The MHTS is of the view that rule 58 could be used to alleviate the pressure on patients and carers from attending hearings where there is no dispute with regard to the matter before the Tribunal.

The issue of Recorded Matters is one which has been recently addressed by the MHTS in its practice. A Mental Welfare Commission Study on Recorded Matters came to the conclusion that a large proportion of the matters which were recorded could not be implemented because



they were too general or were not linked to any particular timescale. It was therefore decided that the MHTS should offer all its members evening training sessions on Recorded Matters covering the statutory provisions and the drafting of Recorded Matters and this was completed in the spring of this year.

Administrative procedures have been introduced whereby, if a matter is recorded with a time limit, the Tribunal writes to the Responsible Medical Officer (RMO) shortly after the time limit expires to ascertain whether the RMO wishes to refer the matter back to the Tribunal if it has not been implemented. Initially, when such Recorded Matters are referred back to the Tribunal, the cases will be heard by the President of MHTS along with a medical and general member, in order to formalise this procedure and to gain knowledge of the issues involved in Recorded Matters being complied with.

The provisions on Recorded Matters form a significant part of the 2003 Act and serve to place mental health law in Scotland into an improvement mode focused on the individual patient before the Tribunal. Recorded Matters should be used to promote health improvement for the patients who appear before the Tribunal.

In the latter part of 2009, the MHTS took a serious look at its engagement with Service Users', Carers', and Professional Reference Groups throughout Scotland. It was decided that the MHTS would hold local meetings around the country to engage with local users, carers and professionals who have dealings with it. One aim of this process is to engage with local groups involved in mental health services.

Pilot schemes of Triple Hearings are currently ongoing in Aberdeen, Edinburgh and Glasgow. These are pilots to assess the possibility of having three hearings heard in any one day, and they include additional administrative support for the legal conveners, if required, with regard to writing up of decisions.

*“The MHTS is of the view that rule 58 could be used to alleviate the pressure on patients and carers from attending hearings where there is no dispute with regard to the matter before the Tribunal.”*

Users, carers and professionals have been consulted on this matter and there is a lot of support for this pilot project, which will run for a full year, after which the data will be compiled and assessed to see what lessons can be learned. The input from the last Users' and Carers' Group meeting was that the views of patients attending these Triple Hearings should be tested out and so the MHTS has agreed to look at issuing questionnaires to see if there are any marked differences with regard to patient experience.

For more information visit  
[www.mhtscotland.gov.uk](http://www.mhtscotland.gov.uk)

# Older Families Charter for Change

By Ian Hood, Coordinator, Learning Disability Alliance Scotland

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*Six years ago Jeanette Kelly from East Kilbride took a petition up to the Scottish Parliament and pushed for recognition of the needs of older families who were still caring for adult sons and daughters with learning disabilities living at home.*

Jeanette remembered, *"We got a lot of support but in the end the politicians let it slide. There was fine words but no action. However they may have thrown it out but they haven't managed to silence us. I will continue to fight this. Wherever I am, I am a fighter, someone who gets things done."*

Jeanette and other older family carers are helping to launch The Charter for Change. This outlines five steps that can be taken to ensure that the needs of these families are addressed by central and local government. They include accurate research on the numbers and location of families, proper planning for emergencies and for support and a dedicated worker in each area to support families.

Over the next 12 months, the Charter will collect thousands of signatures from older families who want to have their needs recognised. Councillors and Members of the Scottish Parliament will be pressed to add their signatures and all 32 local authorities will be urged to commit to the Charter.

Throughout Scotland thousands of older family carers are living with and caring for adult relatives with learning disabilities. Most are caring for sons and daughters and will have cared for them all their lives. An older carer can be anyone aged over 50 but there are many carers in their 60s, 70s, 80s and 90s that still provide care and support to someone at home.

Projections based on research by the Scottish Consortium for Learning Disability suggests that

7,000 people over the age of 65 were still caring from adults with learning disabilities living at home.

There is a generation of older carers who have a lifelong responsibility for looking after sons and daughters with learning disabilities. This lifetime responsibility can mean that older family carers are under greater physical and mental pressures because of their age and the frailty this can bring. This can be further exacerbated because of the lack of appropriate respite care or a reluctance to access it.

*Jeanette says "It's not all doom and gloom. Our friends were and are our biggest enjoyment. Nowadays we cannot get out a lot so we do a lot of entertaining at home. I've really tried to give Vanessa the best life we can and it's not over yet. I have made many mistakes but I have learned from them. But the most important thing I learned and I learned it quickly was that I couldn't do it on my own and I went to meet other carers like myself and got organised."*

The Charter was launched by 4 collective groups of carers from South Queensferry, Glasgow, South Lanarkshire and West Dunbartonshire and it is this element that makes the Charter different. The Charter is not just about signing up for politicians to act (or not) on its contents. But an organising tool for local groups to use to get action from their local authorities and to hold them to account.

Jeanette concluded by saying, *"I have always pushed for people with learning disabilities to be part of the community. It was only after we did this that local authorities took action. As we get older, we maybe cannot do as much but we can make local authorities look again at the situation. I think*



*"We got a lot of support but in the end the politicians let it slide. There was fine words but no action. However they may have thrown it out but they haven't managed to silence us... Wherever I am, I am a fighter, someone who gets things done."*

*we have paid our dues, we have done our work and now we should be putting our feet up. But we can't. Not yet."*

Ian Hood, Coordinator of the Learning Disability Alliance Scotland, said *"The Charter for Change will help to keep this issue in the public and political eye as we run up to the next... Scottish Parliament elections. The needs of these families have been known for years. Now is the time they were given the proper support and we plan to make sure it is done."*

For information visit [www.ldascotland.org](http://www.ldascotland.org)

## for Scotland's Disabled Children

By Kate Higgins, Policy Manager, for Scotland's Disabled Children Liaison Project

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Since 1999, the Scottish Parliament has created many policies and laws that aim to improve the lives of disabled children, young people and their families. Containing lots of good intentions, they should be making a big difference. But it is difficult to see how and where these good intentions have translated into better lives for disabled children and young people.

for Scotland's Disabled Children (fSDC) was set up in 2007 to secure rights and justice for disabled children and young people. The coalition focuses on 4 key issues:

- Improve the provision of, and access to, quality short breaks
- Increase and improve provision for periods of transition, when young people move through different phases in their lives
- Improve access to better quality, affordable and appropriate childcare provision
- Improve educational opportunities and outcomes for disabled children and young people through better support and provision

Addressing these issues will enable families with disabled children to enjoy the same quality of life as other families—leading, hopefully, to better lives.

The coalition now has 56 members—if your organisation works with disabled children and their families and would like to join the coalition, contact us. We also have over 700 individual supporters, 687 fans on Facebook, and 120 followers on Twitter. Find out below how to join!

The coalition also has a liaison project—the fSDC liaison project—which is funded by the Scottish

Government until 2012. Its role is to act as a conduit between the Scottish Government and significant players in the sector; generating intelligence about services on the ground and better connecting decision makers and stakeholders. The project is also there to drive forward change, working with families, professionals and agencies, identifying where change is needed and how that can best be achieved.

Earlier this year fSDC launched a campaign to track down £34m of Scottish Government money and persuade local councils to spend their share of it on transforming services for disabled children and young people. **'We want our Missing Millions'** has been about empowering parents and families to make change happen at community level, trying to ensure that funding intended to support them and their children reached its destination. Thousands have got involved, writing and sending postcards to local councillors and MSPs demanding their Missing Millions.

So what have we learned about how councils are spending the money? Well a mixed picture across the country with most councils sticking to an agreed line which reflects what we already knew! They have said they did not receive this money for the specific purpose of spending it on disabled children and their families. But most have then given some information about how much they are spending this year on relevant services and support. Where we have received detailed responses, these are now available on the Missing Millions section of the website [www.fsd.org.uk/how-can-you-help/find-the-missing-millions](http://www.fsd.org.uk/how-can-you-help/find-the-missing-millions).

We have not received any information from councils in: Aberdeen City; Angus; Scottish



Borders; Comhairle nan Eilean Saar (Western Isles); Moray; Orkney; Shetland; Perth and Kinross; Ochil; Dundee; East Lothian; Midlothian; West Lothian; North Lanarkshire; South Lanarkshire; East Ayrshire; South Ayrshire; Dumfries and Galloway. If you live in one of these areas, there is still time to get involved in the campaign. Find out more on the website or email or call us.

fSDC is now writing out to all local authorities asking for more information. But we are also thinking about what happens in the next three years. The UK and Scottish Governments are currently undertaking spending reviews which will result in outline spending plans for 2011–2014. The fSDC liaison project in particular is meeting with Scottish Government officials to try and persuade them to keep the next £34million at the centre and create a pot that will definitely be used for services and support for disabled children and young people.

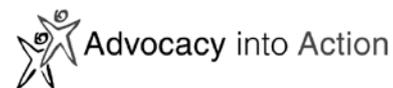
We are totally committed to delivering long lasting change and better lives for disabled children and their families but we need the help of our members and supporters to make change happen. So join us!

You can:

- sign up for news at [www.fsd.org.uk/join](http://www.fsd.org.uk/join)
- join us at [www.facebook.com/forScotlandsDisabledChildren](http://www.facebook.com/forScotlandsDisabledChildren)
- follow us at [www.twitter.com/fSDC](http://www.twitter.com/fSDC)
- email [info@fsdc.org.uk](mailto:info@fsdc.org.uk)
- phone 0131 659 2939

*“We want our Missing Millions has been about empowering parents and families to make change happen at community level, trying to ensure that funding intended to support them and their children reached its destination...there is still time to get involved in the campaign”*

# Advocacy into Action: Parents' Advocacy Project



*Starting in April 2010, with a funding period of three years, Advocacy Into Action has secured a full time position supporting parents with learning disabilities whose children are subject to Child Protection procedures.*

Having worked in this area for several years, Advocacy Into Action is well positioned to provide bespoke support for the views of these parents and try to ensure engagement between families and support services, both statutory and voluntary.

A large part of this is aiding individuals in understanding the various pieces of formal correspondence sent throughout the process. Only then can considered opinions and views be sought and noted for relevant actions.

Preparing for, accompanying to and understanding the decisions made in formal meetings such as LAC Reviews, LAAH Reviews, Core Group Meetings, Children's Hearings,

Permanency Hearings, Adoption & Fostering Panels and Sheriff court hearings are all crucial as is supporting the parent to access suitable and inclusive legal advice for relevant meetings.

The aim of the project is to support parents to:

- have access to all the relevant information,
- attend formal meetings as required,
- fully understand their rights and choices,
- feel like participants in any processes,
- work alongside all involved professionals and
- feel listened to and respected throughout.

Paul McKee, Parents' Advocacy Worker  
Advocacy into Action  
[www.advocacyintoaction.org](http://www.advocacyintoaction.org)